

Hetist (W.V.)

Terre Haute Saturday Evening Mail JUNE 29, 1895

SIES, WALTER

A few months ago Walter Sies, the artist, originated the plan of painting a picture of the old fort as it was represented in the early engravings, and secured subscriptions from business men and others to pay for the same, the picture when completed to be presented to the city and hung in the council chamber. His plan was very successfully carried out, and on the evening of May 7th Colonel W. E. McLean presented the painting to the council, in a speech that is worthy of reproduction in this connection. In the graceful manner for which he is noted, Colonel McLean said:

A number of our citizens, inspired mainly by the action of you city officials, feeling that it would be eminently appropriate that this council-chamber should now be adorned by a work of art, of historic value, and of special local interest, a painting typifying our early territorial days, the contemplation of which recalls the most important events in the early settlement of this wonderful Wabash valley, have themselves raised the money necessary to purchase that picture, which now graces your walls, and I have been delegated to formally present the same to your honorable body, and ask its acceptance by you, in behalf of the citizenship in our city.

The artist has named this picture "Fort Harrison in 1812." That the picture is one of historic value and of the highest local interest to the people represented by you will not be questioned. There, depicted upon that canvas, is the first scene enacted here upon this prairie in that grand transformation from the wilderness to the metropolis, from savagery to civilization, from chaos to achievement.

Now, unlike his honor, the mayor, and you, gentlemen of the council, I am no apostle in art, nor connoisseur in painting. My early education in that respect has been sadly neglected. I presume I can modestly remark, however, without invading the sacred domain of art, that this picture, the work of gentleman who may be regarded as Terre Haute artist, Mr. Walter Sies, is no pretentious sketch of fancy, it is no labored effort of artistic imagination, it is simply a true and faithful reproduction, upon an enlarged scale, and not too highly colored, of an original draft of that historic old structure, drawn before the days of photography, by Luther Hager and James Modesitt.

Now, if I have made any mistake, from an aesthetic standpoint, in speaking of this picture, as a work of art, my excuse is the same which was given by Dr. Johnson in regard to a mistake in his dictionary, namely, that it was "purely ignorance." I am authorized, at least, to say that the picture is vouchered for as an accurate representation of our most celebrated old landmark of the early times, old Fort Harrison, as it stood in its rude solitude upon the banks of our beautiful Wabash in those old days when the Indian war whoop was heard upon the spot where we now stand, and the tomahawk of the savage was as much to be feared and certainly far more potent than the club of the policeman, even when wielded by one of our very efficient force.